

REMARKS

Claims 11-28 are pending in this application. By this Amendment, claims 11-13 and 26-28 are amended. No new matter is added.

I. Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §112

The Office Action rejects claims 27 and 28 under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for being dependent on claim 11. As claims 27 and 28 are amended so as not to depend from claim 11, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

II. Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

A. Claims 11-19 and 26 over Watanabe

The Office Action rejects claims 11-19 and 26 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 5,482,558 to Watanabe, et al. (hereinafter Watanabe). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 11 recites, in part, " the supporting parts and the column member being a monolithic piece of a same material."

The Office Action acknowledges that Watanabe fails to disclose supporting parts integrally formed with the column members, but asserts the term integral is "sufficiently broad to embrace constructions united by such means as fastening and welding." Claim 11 has been amended to clarify that the supporting parts and the column member are a monolithic piece of a same material, and are not connected by fastening and welding. For the reasons discussed below, such a construction would not have been obvious to those of ordinary skill in the art.

Under MPEP §2141.02, in determining the differences between the prior art and the claims, the question under 35 U.S.C. §103 is not whether the differences themselves would have been obvious, but whether the claimed invention as a whole would have been obvious.

See, e.g. Stratoflex, Inc. v. Aeroquip Corp., 713 F.2d 1530 (Fed. Cir. 1983). Applicant

submits that "forming a structure formally of separate elements into an integral structure" in the context of the claimed invention would not only involve "routine skill in the art," as alleged in the Office Action, and has various advantages over a welded or joined multiple piece structure, such as the structure shown in Watanabe.

Specifically, the above-described monolithic piece of a same material structure eliminates the need to additionally prepare an auxiliary jig in a shape of a circular arc or a ring, thereby enabling a wafer to be supported in a large area along a circumferential part of the wafer. See pg. 15, line 18-pg. 16, line 1. Furthermore, the above-described monolithic piece of a same material structure results in supporting parts with high surface accuracy and high strength, at least because the supporting parts and the column members are fixed as one. See pg. 22, lines 2-5. This high surface accuracy and high strength results in annealed wafers having a decreased probability of a slip dislocation or a backside flaw based on the dispersed load of the wafer. See pg. 22, lines 18-27. Therefore, the annealed wafers can be mass produced at a low cost and with high productivity. Additionally, because the boat can be relatively easily produced with small amounts of material, the boat becomes low in cost. See pg. 16, lines 1-16. Watanabe does not provide and fails to recognize these advantages, and therefore the claimed invention would not have been obvious over Watanabe.

For at least these reasons, withdrawal of the rejection of claim 11 and the claims depending therefrom is respectfully requested.

Claim 26, recites, in part, "the supporting parts and the column member being formed as a monolithic piece of a same material."

As discussed above, Watanabe fails to disclose forming the supporting parts and the column member as a monolithic piece of a same material. Therefore, Watanabe cannot teach or suggest the features of claim 26. Therefore, withdrawal of the rejection of claim 26 is respectfully requested.

B. Claims 20-25 over Watanabe in view of Nakai

The Office Action rejects claims 20-25 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Watanabe in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,474,987 to Nakai, et al. (hereinafter Nakai). This rejection is respectfully traversed.

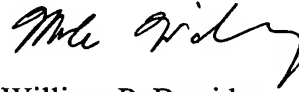
Claims 20-25 depend from claim 11. Therefore, because claim 11 is now in condition for allowance for the reasons detailed above, Applicant asserts claims 20-25 are also now in condition for allowance at least based on their dependence on an allowable base claim, as well as for additional features they recite. Therefore, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

III. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that this application is in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and prompt allowance of the claims are earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner believe that anything further would be desirable in order to place this application in even better condition for allowance, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number set forth below.

Respectfully submitted,



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WPB:MKW/mef

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Attachment:
Amendment Transmittal

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